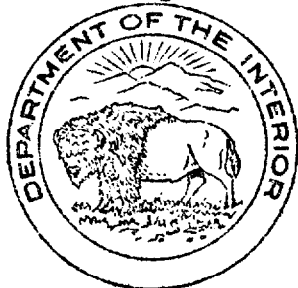


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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

INFORMATION SERVICE

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

For Release TO PMs, THURSDAY, JUNE 22, 1944

Between 60,000 and 70,000 Alaska seal skins will be taken on the Pribilof Islands this summer, Secretary of the Interior Ickes announced today. Last year the record number of 117,000 skins were taken to make up for the 1942 season when no skins were obtained because of military operations in the neighborhood of the islands.

The Fish and Wildlife Service, which manages the seal herd, by far the largest in the world, reported that stocks of skins now on hand, plus those to be taken this summer would create an inventory of satisfactory size.

The processing of seal skins, a carefully guarded commercial secret, is both long and complicated. Months are required to bring a skin from the raw state to its final silken luster. The work requires considerable skill, and lack of manpower has now restricted the output of finished skins to about 45,000 a year.

The present population of fur seals on the Pribilofs is estimated at about 2,750,000. When the United States first bought the islands along with Alaska in 1867 more than 4,000,000 animals were in the herd but ruthless killing by commercial lessees of the rights, plus pelagic sealing by nationals of other countries resulted in a decline in the population to only 120,000 by 1910. As a conservation measure the government took direct control of the operations in the following year. Not only has the size of the herd tremendously increased since that time but some \$10,000,000 have poured into the Federal treasury as profits from the operations.

The Pribilof Islands, which are in the Bering Sea, constitute the only land that members of the herd ever visit. Here every summer, after a winter spent swimming in the Pacific, come the seals to breed. Normally each adult female gives birth to a 12-pound pup within a few hours or days after reaching the islands. The females are kept in harems by the much larger bulls and are not allowed to leave land until after being bred again. The bulls themselves, being busy in seeing that their wives do not stray, do not eat for weeks during the breeding season.

Young males, not yet large enough to take part in the annual fight for females, are crowded to one side in so-called bachelor quarters. It is from these males, the three-year-olds, that skins are taken. The sealing season reaches its heights in the first week of July.